DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 296 596 FL 017 505

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TITLE Subject from a Forest: Linguists as Contractors.
PUB DATE Jun 87
NOTE 15p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the University of Southern Florida Linguistics Club Conference on Second Language Acquisition and Second Language Teaching (7th, Tampa, FL, June 19-20, 1987).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Classroom Techniques; *English (Second Language); *Grammar; Logical Thinking; *Questioning Techniques; Second Language Instruction; *Sentence Structure

ABSTRACT

In their efforts to understand the grammar of English as a second language, students often confuse the two roles that grammatical elements play: form and function. A classroom technique for helping students distinguish between the two is to create playful analogies for specific structures, in which students must use reasoning to determine the form appropriate to the intended function of the structure. This is accomplished through a series of questions directed at isolating grammatical elements in a given sentence and clarifying their place within the sentence syntax. (MSE)

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SUBJECT FROM A FOREST: LINGUISTS AS CONTRACTORS

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Paper presented at the
Seventh Annual USF Linguistics Club Conference
on Second Language Acquisition and Second Language Teaching
19-20 June, 1987, Tampa, Florida

Human beings have a natural genetic affinity toward the acquisition of a language, but as students this picture changes somewhat--there is a natuaral hatred toward grammar. There is some relief available here because grammar as it has been envisioned in this country can be presented in a much more palatable manner in the schools. For entirely too long students have been confused about two central issues in grammar: the notion of location or place, and the notion of function or reason for a structure. Some items, indeed, are so close that they are veritable forests in the land of grammar. The linguist, then, must clear the forest, and pull the trees out. I wish to examine a fun way to remove trees from the grammatical forest. Just as there are many contractors, there are many models of grammar. So the person who does the clearing has adopted a certain model of grammar--he or she has contracted in order to clear the forest.

For years my contractor has been Chomsky.[1] More recently my methods were subcontracted to Fillmore.[2] In the area of teaching function I found Fillmore's model appealing to students to the point that grammar began to take on the aura of excitement. I came to the conclusion that function for a language can be taught just as effectively as it could in mathematics.

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A B S T R A C T

In their efforts to understand the grammar of English, students often confuse the two roles that elements play: form and function. Both show a certain amount of formalism to be mastered in the classroom, but these items can be mastered in a fun way. Aside from this, language is not perceived to have a formalism akin to mathematics, and this is in part the error made by teachers of English and other languages.

However, every forest has a wolf lurking in the shadows. The ugliest beast in grammar remains the separation of form from function. My contract with Chomsky helped my students with location issues, but soon it was noted that function vies for recognition. It became apparent that a multimodel presentation might be the solution. I accepted a more pragmatic approach to the teaching of grammar, encorporating Chomsky and Fillmore in order to isolate the separate issues enough so that students could clear the difficulties.[3]

A very good example comes quickly to mind: I call it the "plug-in" principle. Using the cliched phrase 'you and I' let us look at two examples.

(1) You and I need to talk over our differences sometime.

(2) Someone wants to meet with you and me about that problem last week.

Now, students need to be encouraged to examine data much as a linguist does when seeking solutions to grammatical issues. A student should be encouraged to ask questions like the following:

> Why do we have YOU AND I in sentence (1), but YOU AND ME in sentence (2)?

This is an interesting problem because it is so widespread that this particular example is not trivial at all. The worst thing that can happen is the 'overkill' or hyperurbanization of YOU AND I. Let me illustrate: Suppose I enter class and tell the students that the correct phrase is YOU AND I, and that it is like putting a plug in a wall-receptacle--simply insert the plug into any available outlet. In this example, then, we would insert the plug YOU AND I into any sentence (the two above) and get:

(1') You and I need to talk over our differences sometime.

(2') *Someone wants to meet with you and I about that problem last week.

Now, I tell my students that the modern plugs will not work in the old sockets because the 'hot' prong is smaller than the 'ground' one. I tell

my students that such hyperurbanisms often lead to cliche or metaphorical 'frozen' forms. The example you and I in this country has rapidly become a frozen 'plug' in strings such as '*between you and I,' '*for you and I,' '*because of you and I.' The only way out of this forest for the student is to recognize the all important part of grammar concerning function.

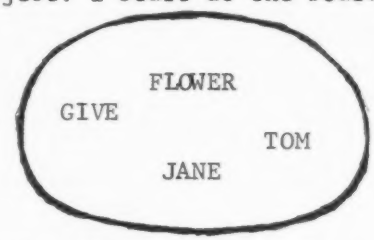
Function is the domain of logical reason. The only problem is that often what seems to be reasonable is not. For example, in some highly 'inflected' languages with 'surface-case' relations, there are times when the use of a case seems to contradict reason. When I teach Russian, for example, I tell students that the host of 'HOLD SWAY OVER' verbs conveniently command the instrumental case. Such HOLD SWAY verbs include rule, drive, conduct.[4] These ideas hold little meaning for natives of non 'surface-case' rich languages like English or Spanish. Fillmore enters the classroom at this time. I teach a modified Fillmore model which is closer to the Langendoen approach: use familiar models to illustrate unfamiliar functions. Langendoen's approach is to set up the following model:

VERBS	---	DRAMAS
NOUNS	---	DRAMATIS PERSONAE
ADJECTIVES	---	COSTUMES FOR DRAMATIS PERSONAE
ADVERBS	---	PROPS/ DIRECTIONS

My model is one which talks about a chef in the kitchen:

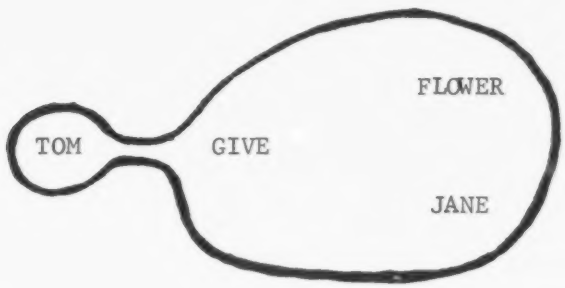
A GIVEN VERB	----	NAME OF GIVEN SOUP IN CAULDRON
NOUNS	----	INGREDIENTS

First, I tell students to imagine the sentence as a cauldron where soup is to be prepared for lunch. The chef decides on VEGETABLE SOUP. So, the stock and vegetables are prepared and a recipe instructs the chef in how these ingredients are to be prepared. The cauldron is the sentence, but VEGETABLE identifies a verb, say, GIVE. Now, VEGETABLE generally means that certain vegetables are to be used and not others. In the same way, I tell the students that GIVE generally is associated with certain functions that are named by nouns or noun phrases. Generally, with GIVE we think of a 'GIVER,' a 'GIVEE', and the 'PRESENT.' In the cauldron, these things are all mixed up and turning over and over as they bubble. Our minds in similar fashion attempt to settle on these concepts, trying to pull one out for special attention--a subject. I start at the board with the forest:

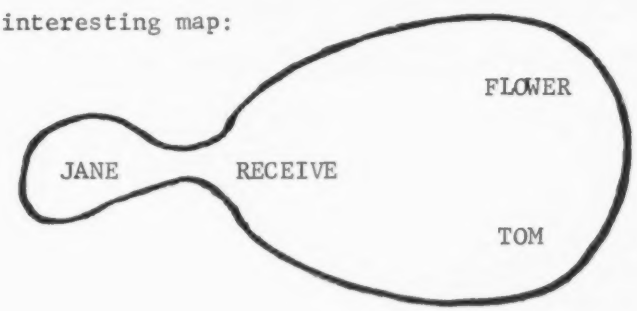


Then I ask the students to tell me what they know about the pragmatics of culture: Who in this culture generally receives a flower--boy or girl? In other words, does a boy give a girl a flower, or does a girl give a boy a flower (generally)? Most students respond that the girl gets the flower. Then I go to Fillmore by asking: What can you tell me about the recipient? ANIMATE or INANIMATE? In this sentence the student sees that the recipient is ANIMATE, but cannot generalize easily. Most of my students think that beneficiaries are ANIMATE, however. The next step in clearing the forest is to select a tree. I tell them to be like the chef. A chef samples his soup (or at least that is the stereotype of a chef). Suppose he samples the

ONION. (Remember that the VEGETABLES are the NOUNS). He takes the spoon and puts it into the cauldron to lift out the onion. Now, let us suppose that TOM is the onion. The chef removes the onion from the cauldron, but a person making a sentence needs to take TOM out of the forest and put him BEFORE (to the left) of the verb GIVE. So far we have the map:



Now, we can call TOM the SUBJECT. The rest of the forest is PREDICATE. Now, what would happen if the chef wanted to try the carrot? Suppose the CARROT to be the noun JANE. To sample the other vegetable, the chef needs to pull out the carrot. The speaker of a sentence needs to put JANE to the left of the verb, and put TOM back into the cauldron. Now, we get a very interesting map:



I show my students that 'paired' verbs of this type often seem to change depending upon the choice of subject, but this is a perfect place to teach about DEEP STRUCTURES as Chomsky envisions them. There is a basic verb which is universal in languages, specifying that some object y has passed from x's hands over to z's possession:

X	PASSED OVER	Y	TO	Z.	=	X	GAVE	Y	TO	Z.
Z	GOT	Y	FROM	X.	=	Z	RECEIVED	Y	FROM	X.

Another common relationship of this type is seen below:

X	PASSED OVER	Y	TO	Z	=	X	SOLD	Y	TO	Z.
Z	GOT	Y	FROM	X	=	Z	BOUGHT	Y	FROM	X.

Such 'change-of-hands' verbs should be taught to students with these maps in mind. Together with that, students should always consider the ANIMACY feature when confronting the BENEFICIARY in such a process. These factors all involve FUNCTION. In English, functions can be mapped onto position. The subject usually is found to the left of the verb (exceptions: subjects are postpositioned after THERE IS/ARE ... and HERE IS/ARE.... formulae). Like the Slavic pattern, ADVERBIAL PHRASES can be in initial position:

[IN THE DARK CELLAR] WAS A MYSTERIOUS BOX.

I tell students to bypass the ADV^{o}_{loc} here and select the NP after the verb. They have a much higher chance to get the subject by the well known PROCESS OF ELIMINATION, in grammar. Let me illustrate that principle in

practical terms. To find the subject, first look for the noun phrase to the left of a verb. Select one with NO preposition head:

THE LEADER OF THE GANG DECIDED TO CALL A MEETING TODAY.

The first problem for the student in clearing the forest is to find the VERB. The student wants to know why. I tell him or her that the verb names the SOUP. The subject and the other names in the sentence can be located if we know the kind of soup. Step one gives us the word DECIDED. Next, we know that if there was a decision, someone had to make it. We undergo a process of elimination. Step one gives us this sentence:

The leader of the gang DECIDED to call a meeting today.

Step Two eliminates NP's with PREPOSITION heads:

The leader OF THE GANG DECIDED to call a meeting today.

By eliminating the PREP + NP, we get:

The leader decided to call a meeting today.

Step Three is to look for a noun or noun phrase to the left of the verb:

THE LEADER decided to call a meeting today.

Step Four is to ask whether we still have other preposition-headed NP's between THE LEADER and the verb. The answer is that we do not, so THE LEADER is subject and it stands out clearly. We have cleared one end of the forest. From all this, we can see that "subject-construction" is the result of <u>inspecting one NP at a time</u>, or <u>sampling only one element from the kettle of soup</u>.

Let us run through a few typical sentence samples in order to illustrate the method. Students need to remember that at first the method does seem a bit over mechanical, but the required mechanism of this method does pay off later when the student can shift to a more automatic problem-solving stage. Here are some sample sentences.

1. The boss of the company decided to consider lay-offs in face of setbacks.

METHOD: Q1. Where is the MAIN VERB (the LAST verb of a series)?

A1. DECIDED.

The boss of the company DECIDED to consider lay-offs in face of setbacks.

Q2. Where , if any, are the PREPOSITION-HEADED NP's?

A2. OF THE COMPANY. Delete this phrase from consideration.

The boss OF THE COMPANY DECIDED to consider lay-offs in face of setbacks.

Q3. Is there a NP to the left of the removed NP of Q2, which is between this removed NP and initial position; or is a NON-HEADED PREP NP in initial position of a declarative sentence?

A3. Yes. THE BOSS, in the position:

$$\#\ \text{THE BOSS}\ {}_{PP}[\ \text{OF THE COMPANY}\ ]_{PP}\ \cdots$$

CONCLUSION: THE BOSS is the subject.

2. Is there a broom in the closet?

Q1. What is the typology of the sentence?

A1. Interrogatory.

Q2. What is the verb?

A2. IS.

Q3. Is there a formulaic string here?

A3. Yes, WHAT IS ....

Q4. Is there a PREPOSITION-HEADED NP?

A5. Yes, IN THE CLOSET. Delete this phrase from consideration.

Now we have the sentence string

Is there a broom ?

Q5. Is there an existential THERE?

A5. Yes. Delete this string.

Is a broom?

Q6. Is there a NON-PREPOSITION HEADED NP string left?

A6. Yes, A BROOM. This is the subject.

3. In the garage under my car lay my pet cat.

Q1. What is the typology of the sentence?

A1. Declarative.

Q2. Are there any sentence-initial ADVERBIAL PHRASES?

A2. Yes, IN THE GARAGE and UNDER MY CAR. Delete these from consideration.

*Lay my pet cat.

Q3. What is the verb?

A3. LAY.

Q4. Are there any PRONOUNS (used as adjectives) or ADJECTIVES?

A5. Yes. MY and PET. Eliminate these from consideration.

*Lay cat.

Q6. Is there a NON-PREPOSITION HEADED NP in the string?

A6. Yes. CAT. This is the subject.

With a little practice the student can determine how these questions are ordered in a flow-chart representing the elimination of NP strings to reveal a subject in any given sentence. Obviously, near the head of the list of questions to ask are those pertaining to sentence-typology, HERE IS/ARE, THERE IS/ARE formulae, and other existential types which tend to put subjects

after their verbs since these formulae are "introducers" of subjects.

When students are fairly confident about selecting subjects, then they will be able to distinguish number so that the problems of AGREEMENT can be discussed with intelligence. Let us look at some examples.

1. The barking (S) of the dogs down the street has (V) kept me awake all night.
2. The dogs (S) down the street have (V) kept me awake all night.
3. She sat in one (S) of the three chairs that are (V) in the room.

Numbers one and two above seem fairly uncomplicated since the subjects are easily isolatable and NUMBER is assigned to the FIRST verb in a string of verbs. In one we have HAS KEPT; in two, HAVE KEPT. In these two sentences the PREPOSITION-HEADED NP strings are deleted.

Sentence 3 presents us with a few new issues. First, we call ONE subject although it follows a preposition and would appear to be PREPOSITION-HEADED. In fact, the laws I stated for PREPOSITION-HEADED NP should apply to MODIFICATION STRINGS only--i.e., those that LIMIT other NP's. In this sentence the PREPOSITION-HEADED NP that shows modification is OF THE CHAIRS. The question is: ONE WHAT? ONE $_{PP}$[OF THE THREE CHAIRS]$_{PP}$. Now, another interesting question arises. Modern syntax of the transformation vintage views the string THAT as a surface relative pronoun. If this is the case, then THAT is the surface spelling for CHAIRS which is in the string THREE CHAIRS. This presents the student with a dilemma. First, since he has been told to eliminate all PP strings from subject lists, he will eliminate the string OF THE THREE CHAIRS, leaving

She sat in one that ...? in the room.

Second, having deleted the string OF THE THREE CHAIRS, we now have the relative pronoun as surface respelling of a deep structure noun ONE:

$$_S[\text{She sat in ONE} \quad {}_S[\text{ ONE IS in the room }]_S]_S .$$

When I was in the sixth grade in a private school, I was told by my English teacher that in this instance we appeal not to a mechanical selection of the subject in order to determine the acceptable NUMBER for the verb, but to LOGIC. The room simply has THREE CHAIRS. This call for a "logical" conclusion to the problem explains to many how the number question has been decided. I, however, would suggest that the transformational analysis of the number derives from the relativization of THAT from the deep-structure CHAIRS, which just by coincidence happens to fulfill the conditions of the problem of logic in this case. There are many such sentences in English. This is not an isolated type, but belongs to a larger NATURAL CLASS of what I like to call NUMBER VIA LOGIC:

1. Jack met one of the three boys that are members of the club.
2. I read a few of the many books that are in that shelf.
3. Only one of the many students that are here today will possibly become a summa cum laude graduate.

These sentences all represent the phenomenon discussed above. There are other syntactic problems and issues to be covered, but these will need to be examined in future.

N O T E S

1. Most beneficial to both students and teachers is the early work, Syntactic Structures, which supplies a good deal of the basic theoretical framework for generative syntax. Aspects of the Theory of Syntax (1965) develops the 1957 work, but is more abstract in its framework since it incorporates features and attempts to account for some semantic interpretations. The latest work, Language and Problems of Knowledge (1988), highlights Chomsky's thinking relative to abstracted deep structures and the possible mapping of anaphoric relations in syntax. These lectures continue the ongoing research in binding theory as it addresses anaphor, bracketing, and various semantic "place-holders" in syntax.

2. Charles Fillmore's greatest impact was his initial work relating case to frames and frames to the nature of the verb in his "The Case for Case," in Emmon Bach, and Robert Harms (eds.), Universals in Linguistic Theory, 1-88, in 1968. In 1969 Fillmore augmented his views in his work "Toward a Modern Theory of Case," in Modern Studies in English, edited by Dave Reibel and Sanford Schane, 361-75.

3. This pragmatic attitude in teaching helps in terms of organizing teaching models. Having reviewed an extensive body of literature on the so-called "Direct Method," I summarize by stating in favor of a "pragmatized" view of the various methods. See my paper, "The Direct Method"(1974), in USFLQ, XIII/1-2, 35-41.

4. These verbs in Russian, for example, require the complement NP in the instrumental case. For speakers of English, the sentence JOHN MANAGES THE DEPARTMENT STORE appears to be an innocent SUBJECT-VERB-OBJECT type, with direct (accusative-like) object in the complement. For Russian, the verb MANAGE is one of the "HOLD SWAY OVER" types, thus requiring that the complement here be instrumental:

Ivan zaveduet magazinom.
AGT. V INSTR.

B I B L I O G R A P H Y

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